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Panther Terms Are Suspended

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP)—The last two Black Panthers charged in the slaying of fellow Panther Alex Rackley received suspended sentences in Superior Court today.

Landon Williams, 27, and Rory Hithe, 20, both of Oakland, Calif., had pleaded guilty on Oct. 26 to charges of conspiracy to murder.

State's Atty. Arnold Markle had said in court both had indicated they would return to California.

They both had originally been charged with two crimes that could have brought the death penalty—kidnaping resulting in death and aiding and abetting murder in connection with Rackley's death in May of 1969.

MARKLE ORIGINALLY charged that they took part, as national Panther emissaries, in a plot involving 14 persons, including national Panther chairman Bobby G. Seale.

Hithe and Williams were arrested in Denver, Colo., shortly after Rackley's body was found in a central Connecticut swamp in May 1969.

They walked from the courthouse today, free for the first time in 30 months.

Hithe was given a suspended sentence of 1 to 3 years. Williams was given a suspended sentence of 2½ to 5 years, with one year on probation.

Both also were sentenced to suspended three-month terms, after pleading guilty to assault charges in connection with a fight with prison guards last spring.

JUDGE OTTO LaMacchia pronounced the sentence and formally dismissed all the other charges against the two defendants, on Markle's recommendation.

Markle asked for the suspended sentence for Hithe, saying he was only 17 at the time of the murder. He made no recommendation in Williams' case.

Defense attorney Hugh F. Keefe said Williams and Hithe had "saved the state of Connecticut a great deal of money by pleading as they did."

He also said Williams has "an excellent record" because he is married, has a child, was a junior at San Francisco State College at the time of his arrest and has no other record of trouble with the law.

JUDGE LaMACCHIA also noted the defendants' "excellent record" before he imposed the suspended sentences. Otherwise, he didn't give a specific reason for his decision.

Keefe said after the hearing, however, that the defendants' plea in each case "was a compromise. Whenever you cop a plea, it's a compromise."

Seale and Panther organizer Ericka Huggins also were charged with capital crimes in the case, but their charges were dismissed after their lenthy trial ended in a "hung jury."